

It is important to note that I am not a DL teacher. I am a f2f teacher of grade 5/6 who is working to incorporate more use of technology into my classroom environment. Many of the practices of a f2f vs. an DL or OL teacher are the same and simply aim to meet a common standard of best practices. Here are a few of the ways that I try to create and foster a teaching, social and cognitive presence in my own classroom.

**Ministry of Education
Quality Review: Internal Review Guide**

Instructional Practices – Questions for reflection

As a distributed learning teacher, what do you do to create a **teaching presence** in your classes?

<p>1. Communicate course topics, goals, timelines, and expectations regarding assignments?</p>	<p>A lot of work in terms of setting up course goals, timelines and expectations come at the beginning of the year for me. I provide my students with a copy of my year overview so they know where they will be going this year in terms of their learning and what topics we will cover. I set expectations, not only for behaviour and work completion, but also for their participation in class discussions and activities, their attitudes towards school and their learning and how much effort they need to put into everything they do. If those expectations aren't met at any point throughout the year – we have a talk and look for ways to improve the student's engagement in their learning and their effort in their work.</p> <p>I also start each unit with an overview of what we will learn (typically I give them the PLO's and discuss how it will look as we progress through the unit) and build in a vocabulary activity so that students can get a baseline understanding of the subject matter prior to starting.</p> <p>For every assignment that I give I try to give students a rubric that outlines where they will get marks, what I am looking for to award those marks and what the total marks for the assignment will be. For instance, in the French Family Tree I just assigned last week, students are aware that they get one mark for properly labelling themselves, 10 marks for labelling and naming 10 family members and 4 marks for the creativity and neatness of their tree – and I gave suggestions of how to get those creativity marks (like an apple around every name, family pets drawn at the bottom of the tree, some chipmunks or birds on the tree, etc.) I have students who regularly take pictures of the rubric with their iPods to ensure that they are covering all the bases as they complete their work.</p> <p>I think an area where I can improve in building this aspect of teacher presence is by referring back to these outcomes upon the completion of a unit or assignment to help students reflect on their work and track their own progress. My math tests are broken up into PLO sections so students can gain an understanding of where their strengths and weaknesses lie in math, but I think that I can do this for more assignments and definitely when we get to the end of a unit in, say, Science or Socials. Here are the outcomes, did we meet them and, if so, how? If not, did we get part of it? Why didn't we meet the outcomes? How can we change it so we can do better on the next unit?</p>
<p>2. Provide instruction to students about participation in activities, productive dialogue, and task expectations, as well as providing instruction to help students master content and achieve learning outcomes?</p>	<p>Again, I think I do this in the form of class and individual discussions as to what my expectations are. I see this a lot in the course we are currently taking (OLT502) as rubrics are provided that outline expected levels of participation. In the f2f classroom participation is easier to encourage 'in the moment' as I can look around and see any student that is not fully engaged in an activity and support them to get back on track. It's less of a "you've only made two posts" and more of a "you seem to be daydreaming, what are your thoughts on..." redirecting type approach.</p> <p>I encourage the use of AB partner talk in my class where students are paired and have to have a discussion and be ready to report out to the class. For instance in spelling we do a fun sort with our words on Wednesdays and one partner (chosen with random, usually silly identifiers) has to report out "my partner ___ and I chose to sort by ___ because ___". Every student is required to have that discussion with their partner because no one knows who will end up having to report out to the group and I have seen improvement in even the most shy of my students.</p> <p>In these ways (and more) I require students to participate in small and large group discussions and activities and encourage them to build connections to their work</p>

	<p>and to each other.</p> <p>As for instructing to help students master content and achieve learning outcomes, this is what I do every day. Be it in the form of a lesson, an activity or simply guiding my students along their learning path, my job is to help them understand and achieve the learning outcomes as set out by the ministry.</p> <p>The Internal Review Guide included netiquette here and in order to build an understanding (in my f2f class) of proper online communication I build in discussions around acceptable uses and provide guidelines as to what I will or will not accept in their online communications (including reminding them that I can read what they blog and post in our virtual classroom and they have to think “hmm...would I want Mrs. Sward to read this...”). We have had instances of inappropriate messages and found them to be valuable lessons in appropriate use of technology in the classroom.</p> <p>As I mentioned above I think I need to revisit outcomes more at the end of a unit and ask my students – “did you achieve this – how? And why or why not?” During the course of the unit I am providing lessons, assigning tasks and providing feedback on a regular basis, but at the end of a unit I see this process as a valuable tool to build student understanding of the content we just covered as well as how and when they learn best and how they perceived that their learning improved throughout the unit.</p>
<p>3. Guide students to help identify areas of agreement or disagreement on course topics, help clarify student’s thinking about course topics, focus discussion on relevant issues, and help students explore new concepts in the course?</p>	<p>I think that in the classroom I have discussions that would speak to this realm of building teacher presence. In many ways our learning is dictated by the PLOs set out by the ministry, but the way in which we reach those PLOs are ours to determine. Students are able to provide input into their learning to the extent of how we go about that exploration. Part of that is choosing tools and resources and part of that is simply me understanding who my students are and how they learn best and subsequently finding resources or developing projects that would engage and challenge them as learners.</p> <p>We are currently working on personal projects where I have given my students the lead in developing a project that will help others in their school, community or world. At this point I am a resource and support staff for each of their projects and am allowing them to direct the who, what, when, where, how and why of their learning. I am trying to be the unbiased reality check they need to deepen their thinking and help them to outline all aspects of their project, without discouraging their will to help others. In this respect I have allowed them to choose a topic to base their learning on and given them the opportunity to build meaning and relevance in their work.</p> <p>I am just starting to use blogs, discussion threads and wikis (thanks to my own experiences using them in 501 and 502) with my class and it’s too early to tell where that will take us, but my hope is that these tools will create a forum for greater student feedback on my teaching and their learning. .</p>
<p>4. Foster the development of a sense of community among course participants, and provide relevant and timely feedback to students?</p>	<p>The Internal Review Guide suggests that feedback should be relevant, descriptive and provide assessment in a variety of ways. Again, this is simply best practice. For students who are able to tell a story but have written output issues, of course you are going to provide them with a speech-text program that can allow you to assess their creative storytelling abilities, not their spelling or writing challenges.</p> <p>In my classroom I provide a lot of feedback to my students during their learning – questioning or supporting as they learn so that when they hand their final product in, it’s not just “oh, you got 70%, try harder next time.” Where ever possible I use rubrics and show students the rubrics both before and after their work is completed so that they can work towards specific criteria and then see where their strengths were and identify areas they need to work on in future assignments.</p> <p>I also try to design projects that provide choice for students (tied to the idea of a differentiated classroom). In this respect a student who is a good writer and is organized in presenting facts could write a report on a given topic whereas a more outgoing student might create a news report on the same topic or an artistic student might create a diorama or art collection tied to the topic.</p> <p>As for providing <u>timely</u> feedback to my students, I will often (much to my family’s chagrin) work myself to the bone to keep up with marking and assessments of my student’s work in order for them to receive feedback on their work and be able to apply it to their work right away, not after the fact where there is no longer any way nor reason to apply it. I think this is important for them to be able to connect the feedback to their learning.</p>
<p>5. Select appropriate resources and/or develop learning materials and content for your students that meet the highest standards for quality and student usability</p>	<p>I have participated in reviews of programs and platforms to support learning in the classroom, most recently on a program called ExpertSpace which is like an online encyclopedia for science and socials topics. There was a huge emphasis on grading each resource based on select criteria that ensured that it was appropriate for all and discriminating to none.</p> <p>I have to admit....I don’t always use the best resources in my classroom. I have a reason for using every resource that I use, but I don’t always weigh every one against the strict criteria that I used when evaluating ExpertSpace for use in the classroom. Sometimes a Youtube video will suffice. Though I haven’t based it against criteria posted to ensure for quality and appropriateness I have viewed it and felt it appropriate and acceptable to the teachable moment. It may not be</p>

	<p>overly comprehensive or entirely without bias or completely accepting of all aspects of society or of every culture – but what the resource will do is provide me with a jumping off point for discussion where I can then cover off all of the aspects while reaching the outcomes that I need to for that topic. I can work in those disclaimers of “this is not meant to diminish the importance of...” or “this is not meant to say that boys/girls/kids are bad at math/science/art/handwriting...”. But I can use a video as a tool to present an alternate opinion or way of life or belief and then challenge that way of thinking as a group to build understanding. Alternatively, there are also times where I use the ministry recommended resources (I’m thinking our math textbooks that shall remain unnamed) that aren’t always the best resource for my students. Giving them a vocabulary based math text when many of them struggle to read and follow directions in the first place and secondly have very little understanding of math terminology is just setting them up for failure. However, when I use this resource I provide supports for those students – in the form of vocabulary activities at the start of the unit, or of doing questions with them and slowly releasing control to them (model, do together, do themselves), or even of bringing in other resources to complement their learning and adapting the program to meet their needs instead of relying on it as the sole resource available. In this respect I work to ensure my classroom is rich in quality resources and accessible to all with the necessary supports.</p>
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In developing a teaching presence in my classroom I try to be as clear as I can about expectations, acceptable behaviours and requirements for achievement. Through the use of rubrics, continuous two-way communication and allowing students to choose projects that work to their strengths as learners or that they are interested in, I aim to help them to realize the learning objectives in a way that is meaningful and relevant to each individual and that will provide them with the tools that they will need to succeed.

As a distributed learning teacher, what do you do to create a **social presence** in your classes?

<p>6. Create a sense of belonging and community for students?</p>	<p>I am a firm believer in creating a welcoming and safe environment for my students where they feel that they can take chances in their learning and thus foster independence and confidence. There are many ways I do this:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) We have a weekly class meeting where we gauge how we are feeling (on a scale of 1-10) and why. This allows them to understand where each of them found success or struggled during the week and create connections based on common experiences. We also discuss any issues or concerns as a group in order to work together to find solutions to problems present in our classroom.2) Have students write weekly journals to me. First they write on a chosen topic for the week and then they write Dear Mrs. Sward where they can share exciting news, struggles they are having and new or interesting things about themselves. This allows me to build a better understanding of who my students are, deal with any interpersonal struggles they may be having in the class, pair them up with other students who have similar interests and generally keep up with what is happening in their lives.3) We present (individual and group) projects to each other and students have to write two stars and a wish for each students work, as well as write something they like about the person or something nice about them. At the end of the presentations I compile their comments into lists and give each student a "here's what others are saying about you.." sheet that helps them to feel good about themselves but also recognize that others see different strengths in them than they might give themselves credit for.4) There are always opportunities for group work – from spelling sorts (outlined above) to project work, to shared time on computers or mobile devices. At the same time, students also have responsibilities to these groups – like doing their share of the work, perhaps having to report out on progress, contributing to group discussions and activities in order to succeed and keeping each other on track.5) Pairing with other classes in our school to create projects that promote one of our 3Rs (responsibility, respectfulness, resourcefulness) or showcase our school (ABCs of Cultus Lake book, our tile mosaic out front of our school, etc.). These activities build up a common pride of our school while requiring students to work together, do their part and push towards a common goal or achievement. <p>Every student in my classroom brings a different set of skills to the table, but each is valued for their individuality and what they can share with the group. Although students can always single another student out for a variety of reasons, we use these instances as an opportunity for discussion in order to broaden understandings, encourage acceptance and build upon the strength of our team. And we also celebrate our successes, individually or as a group and support each other through our struggles. (Last week I played the mean teacher and gave my students three tests! But to make it up to them we are going on a fun field trip to celebrate all of our hard work and the dedication they put into studying for their 'finals.')</p> <p>Two ways I will work to improve my creation of a social presence in my classroom is 1) to build in more self-assessment opportunities where I challenge students with hard questions, like 'is this my best work? What could I change to improve it? What mark would I give it? Does it match the expectations provided on the rubric?' etc. and 2) try to provide my students with more access to their own community of learners by finding another grade 6 class in our district (or perhaps not in our district but somewhere else in the world) via Skype, blogs, wikis or some other tool in order to share ideas and information, collaborate on a common project and learn from each other about how our classes are alike and/or different.</p>
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<p>7. Support student expression in online discussion, building a sense of collaboration?</p>	<p>Firstly, I have to say that any discussions that take place in my classroom have to be respectful and inclusive of others. If someone has a difference of opinion to other students, that is their right to have their opinion, however they have to present it in a respectful manner and listen to and be respectful of others opinions and understand that it is okay if we all have differing views on any given subject. That being said, I encourage each and every student to have their say and provide input to the group. We have a 'class randomizer' tool on our Smartboard where every student's picture is up on the board. All we have to do is click the 'choose' button and it randomly stops on a student. When using this tool – whoever it lands on would be up next to present their ideas, give feedback or have their turn in the discussion and everyone is required to participate. In this respect, we all listen to and support each other.</p> <p>I also find that a great way to encourage students to be participating and engaged in their learning is to give them a hands on activity with a problem to solve and split them into smaller groups. They are usually quite good at holding each other accountable for their part of the work to be done and in order to complete the task they have to work together.</p> <p>I think an area of growth for me in building this sense of collaboration might be in the synchronous/asynchronous aspect of active engagement. Whereas I often have students work together to achieve a specific goal during class time, perhaps I need to look to how I can get them connecting outside of class time to complete tasks or projects. Perhaps that is more applicable to the characteristics of online learning, but I think I can incorporate it into some aspects of our personal projects – students are currently outlining projects that they will undertake to improve the lives of others in our school, community or world (ie: fundraisers for hospice, garbage pick-up around the lake). There is an element of support for each other in completing these projects but I will have to rethink how much of that has to be during class time and how much can take place in collaboration with other students on their own time.</p>
<p>8. Foster the use of a variety of communication strategies, including online strategies, for social interaction among students and teacher?</p>	<p>This has been an area of huge personal growth for me this year. I have created a classroom Facebook page to complement our class website and have just recently begun using our 'virtual classroom/student dashboard' in the classroom. These tools give me an added way of connecting with students and parents, answering student questions when they happen (including on evenings and weekends) rather than having students have to wait until we are in school to get feedback or clarification on an aspect of their homework or project work, and it also provides a place for us to meet online and talk back and forth. The discussion is not always school related (though we are working on that) but we are working to develop this extension of our synchronous class to provide further opportunities for collaboration, interactions and learning opportunities.</p> <p>It is still in its infancy stages but the use of technology as a tool for real time communication and collaboration has huge benefits that I am trying to bring into our learning in a more purposeful way.</p>

All of these structures and practices that I implement in my classroom are meant to build that feeling of trust, belonging and collaboration spoken to in the Internal Review Guide. I work hard to recognize and encourage each of the students in my class (and in my school for that matter) and I have students tell me all the time, "I can hardly wait to be in your class. You get to play with the Smartboard and the iPods and it's gonna be so cool." My hope is that they not only want to play with the technology that I use in the classroom, but also that they have a sense of the community we create as a group and how they will be valued in my classroom for whatever skills or interests they bring to the table. This is one of the areas of my teaching that I most believe in – making students feel confident, capable and welcome in the classroom and showing them that they have a voice there. Twenty years down the road they won't remember that it was me that taught them how to convert a mixed number into an improper fraction or introduced them to the inner workings of an electric circuit – but they will remember how they felt when they were in my class and how that affected their learning and their outlook. To me, that is huge.

As a distributed learning teacher, what do you do to create a **cognitive presence** in your classes?

<p>9. Foster student interest in course issues and content, while supporting the development of new perspectives through student reflection?</p>	<p>Usually I try to hook student interest with a video, app or hands on activity that will get them thinking about what they already know about a subject and what they want to learn. I truly try to engage my students with technology as much as I can because that is how they learn (though not how I learned when I was their age) and so I challenge myself to find new and innovative ways of reaching the same goals but in a way that stimulates and interests them.</p> <p>Instead of me standing at the front lecturing to my students, I try to take a more collaborative approach to learning with them, where each of them might research a certain aspect of the topic we are studying and report it back to the group, or where we explore an issue together and each learn about it in different ways.</p> <p>In this respect we will use a variety of resources (text, online, shared knowledge) to create a variety of projects (complete worksheets, create projects or presentations) and share in the process of learning.</p> <p>An area of further focus for me in the classroom will be to slow down and focus on the reflection piece – both for my students in their work and me in mine. This is definitely a best practice that I do, but not to the extent that I should be doing it.</p>
<p>10. Encourage students to use a variety of information sources, techniques, and approaches to solutions when exploring problems posed in the course?</p>	<p>This has been a huge change in my classroom with the introduction of mobile devices, a Smartboard and access to a school set of laptops and iPads. Whereas three years ago our research was limited to materials that were in the class or library – sometimes on the internet if we could book into the computer lab – now information is at our fingertips and solutions to problems are found quickly and efficiently. Students no longer need to memorize facts and regurgitate them back, now I find we can explore the deeper issues or ask the big questions and support learning by visiting a website or other online resource that can give us the facts that we need.</p> <p>However the advent of all this technology in the classroom has also required me to add to my teaching repertoire as I now need to cover with my students proper ways of communicating online, how to discern what is valuable information and what information is fabricated, where to get accurate information and how to tell if it is not. Even though these are new concepts for them to learn they are all important skills that students will need throughout their lives and careers and that will help them find success in the classroom, too.</p>
<p>11. Support the testing and application of new knowledge for students?</p>	<p>This is where we give them that overall 'big question' and see if they can transfer their learning to a new situation. I am about to try this in my classroom. We have just finished a mapping unit in Social Studies and students now get apply their knowledge by creating their own country (plan it, map it and write about it). I guess we will see how well the information was ingrained in their minds.</p>

I think creating a cognitive presence in the classroom depends on how you, as the teacher, allow students to develop their own learning. This can be accomplished by allowing students to choose their own way of learning, ask questions and seek to find information, challenge their thinking and reflect on their own learning process, much like this assignment has required me to reflect on my own learning and teaching process. I see it as a shared learning journey with my students that will hopefully allow us both to develop new perspectives about how we learn and what supports we need to find success.

In addition, I think it is important to also recognize the Learner Presence in the classroom – what sorts of skills and attitudes that students need to bring to the table in order to have a successful year. Here are some of the ways that I aim to foster a positive Learner Presence in my classroom:

<p>Planning and time management</p>	<p>I aim to foster this by encouraging effective use of planners to track assignment due dates and test dates. When we have a test coming up I have it on the board a week prior, help students pull together study packages based on what is on the test and encourage them to study each night as part of their homework. I send out reminders to students and parents that projects are due on specific dates or that students should have said amount read in their novel study. As students prove to me that they are capable of tracking their own assignments and keeping up to date in their work, I will take them off of my planner list and allow them to have more independence in their own work and take more responsibility in their own learning. This is an area that I typically see huge progress in my students each year.</p>
<p>Organizing and transforming course materials</p>	<p>I do this very directly in the beginning of the year as I am showing student how to organize their binders, build study packages, connect assignments to PLOs and recognize a progression of learning. During lessons and discussions I will often say “do you remember when we...” in order to help students make those connections and see how different topics are connected. As the year progresses I encourage students to make their own connections and apply their own questions to their learning to build their knowledge. At the start of any unit we will do an APK activity (Smart learning) where we set goals, ask questions, make predictions and connections and develop those pathways from existing knowledge to new knowledge that we are creating. Hopefully this allows my students to build broader understandings of not only their course materials, but also the world around them.</p>
<p>Establishing a positive learning environment</p>	<p>I encourage respectful and supportive interactions in my classroom. I often state “I’m such a math geek and I’m totally okay with that” in order to show my students that we each have our own strengths and that we should celebrate them, not hide them (though my students would like me to hide my amazing singing and dancing talents more...hmmm). I try to make their learning fun, engaging, relevant and meaningful. As I said before – they won’t remember what I taught them, but how they felt in my class. My goal is that everyone will feel safe and confident in who they are so that they can contribute in a positive and meaningful way in order for us all to have a better learning experience.</p>
<p>Self-monitoring and record keeping</p>	<p>This is huge – one way that I aim to foster this is by having a homework chart up on the wall. If a piece of work is handed in I check it off, if it’s not, there is a blank space behind the student’s name which results in them being in for homework club. When they ask me what they owe I send them right to the chart. They learn quickly that they are responsible to get their work into me and that there are consequences if they don’t. However, I am not constantly having to chase them to get specific items in – it’s all up there on the wall. (This is also a great tool for when parents drop in as it is there for them to check on whether their child is up to date or not!). This works for most students as typically they learn to track their own assignments by October (though I still have a few regulars in homework club throughout the year).</p>
<p>Help-seeking</p>	<p>I encourage students to ask for help or clarification...in fact it’s often during discussions where students clarify meaning or ask questions, but they are welcome to ask whenever they need to (even via e-mail on the weekends or during evenings). If they can’t get me, they can work together (via blog or discussion thread) to ensure that they are on the right track. Also, assignments are posted on our virtual classroom so there are no excuses for forgetting work at school. This technology is all very new to us, but I am excited to see all of the ways that we can use it to our advantage in the classroom.</p>
<p>Reflection on performance, effort and goal setting</p>	<p>This is an area that I need to work more on. We set personal goals every year, but don’t spend much time reflecting where we are at in achieving those goals. I often question students as to whether they put their best efforts into an assignment, or whether what they give me to mark is their best work, but I have to come up with a way to have them buy in to their learning and achievement more and perhaps be able to argue for a better mark....Perhaps that will be a part of this inquiry based personalized learning that we are heading to.</p>

In short, I am quite demanding of my students. I set the bar high and I tell them that I set the bar high. But I do it for a reason. I often tell my students that half of my job is to teach them the curriculum and the other half is to prepare them for middle school. I have never had a class in which every single student has met every expectation that I put in front of them, but I have also never had a class in which any student has not improved and reached a large number of my expectations. Every year I see huge growth, both academically and socially, in my students and I never forget to share with them just how far they have come and how proud of them that I am. One of the greatest aspects of teaching a split grade is having students come back to you for a second year and seeing how

organized and driven they are and reflecting on how that wasn't the case the first time they were in your classroom. Having them walk in with great organizational skills, confidence and an amazing attitude towards their learning makes it all worth it, especially as you are trying to foster those same traits in the new kids in your class!